

Rodbell commentary

This Week's Citation Classic

CC Number 45
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Rodbell M. Metabolism of isolated fat cells. I. Effects of hormones on glucose metabolism and lipolysis. *J. Biol. Chem.* 239:375-80, 1964. [Laboratory of Nutrition and Endocrinology, National Institute of Arthritis and Metabolic Diseases, National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, MD]

A Homogeneous preparation of isolated fat cells was prepared by treating adipose tissue with collagenase. The isolated fat cells were very sensitive to the actions of insulin on glucose metabolism and responded to a variety of lipolytic hormones with increased production of fatty acids. [The SCI indicates that this paper has been cited over 1,485 since 1964.]

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"This paper was a turning point in the direction of my research career. Prior to this study, I had been concerned principally with the structure of lipoproteins and the mechanism by which chylomicrons were metabolized by liver and adipose tissue. It was during a sabbatical year with Brachet and Gaillard that I became interested in the metabolism and differentiation of animal cells in culture. From that experience I learned how important it was to have a single cell type and a chemically defined medium for such studies.

"From previous experience, I realized that adipose tissue was appropriate material for two reasons. Firstly, the metabolism of adipose tissue was known to be affected by a number of hormones. Secondly, adipose cells, being laden with fat, should be easily separated from other tissue cells since they should float to the sur-

from earlier cytochemical studies that adipose cells were embedded in a matrix of collagen fibers, which suggested that digestion of the collagen might liberate fat cells. Fortunately, a commercial preparation of crude collagenase was available for testing purposes (fortunately, also, that it was a crude enzyme since later studies showed that purified collagenase doesn't work).

"I recall vividly the first experiment, since Houssay was visiting the laboratory that day and observed with me the gradual digestion of the tissue and the release of the pearl-like objects of my desire. 'Great,' he shouted, 'but are they viable cells?' I replied by suggesting that the effects of insulin on glucose metabolism should be an excellent test of their viability. This was demonstrated a short time later. Immediately I recognized the importance of this finding since, until then, the actions of insulin were observed only with intact tissues. Moreover, the isolated cells were responsive to extraordinarily low concentrations of the hormone. From that time onward I have remained committed, for better or for worse, to investigate the molecular basis by which hormones interact with cell surface receptors and thereby alter the physiology and structure of their target cells.

"Peculiarly, the rat fat cell responds to numerous types of hormones. Thus, it is virtually a 'gold mine' for studies of hormone action. Moreover, unlike its tissue counterpart, the isolated fat cell is exposed directly and uniformly to ingredients in the incubation medium, thus providing the means of testing the effects of various agents on cell surface receptors. Undoubtedly, these are the primary reasons why the isolated fat cell preparation has been employed so often in studies of hormone action.

"Naturally, I am gratified by the

face once liberated from the tissue. On returning to NIH, my first task was to find some means of dispersing the tissue in a manner that would release the cells without affecting their normal behaviour toward hormones. I knew

response to this paper. With hindsight, it was a simple, straightforward exercise. Apparently, it often happens that a simple idea can engender consequences that are far beyond the intent."